**The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility. Evaluate this claim.**

Knowledge of any sort gives one a sense of power and the way in which the knowledge one obtains is used is based on the person’s ethics. In my opinion ones ethics are commonly based on reason and emotion as a way of knowing; either one feels what they are doing is correct or has reasons to justify that what they are doing is correct, if asked to do so, considering that one persons reasons may not be justifiable for their actions in another person’s opinion. As in any argument there are different scenarios; where knowledge does or doesn’t carry an ethical responsibility, depending on the knowledge obtained and the ways in which it is used. Ethics are hard to discuss as ones ethics would differ from another. They can’t be tested and depending on the different societies, cultures and religions people are in, moral principles can be different. However there are some global moral principles that humans agree upon. In order to analyse the statement above, “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility”, I’ll use examples various areas of knowledge such as History, Science and of course Ethics.

Consider Albert Einstein and the creation of the atomic bomb. "The pioneers of a warless world are the youth who refuse military service"[[1]](#footnote-1). This quote was one of the many anti-war quotes said by the genius himself. It is because of these quotes that I assumed Einstein wished to do what was morally correct. However, I think Einstein was morally inconsistent as he later signed a letter to President Roosevelt insisting the creating of the atomic bomb using his scientific knowledge (Einstein’s theory of matter). The negative effects the bomb had on Hiroshima and Nagasaki such as death of many people, due to the fire winds and collapsed infrastructure, people were injured and left with burns and the radiation given off by the bombs left many people severely ill, gives one reasons to assume that what Einstein did was morally incorrect. Einstein knew there would be damage but he was not aware of the chain reaction, although after it had happened he understood why.  Einstein said “I made one great mistake in my life... when I signed the letter to President Roosevelt recommending that atom bombs be made; but there was some justification - the danger that the Germans would make them.” If Einstein had not insisted on the creation of these bombs, Germany could have created them and caused more destruction. Einstein was put in a position where he did what he personally thought was morally correct. In such a situation it is difficult to judge what the right or wrong thing to do it as ones personal judgement on what is right is taken into account and the decision is made.

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Other examples such as educated specialists that have the knowledge to do many different things, from repairing cars to saving lives, however this knowledge comes with a great deal of ethical responsibility. Take the case of a doctor. Throughout my life, I’ve come across many doctors and I would always ask, ‘What inspired you to become a doctor’ and I often got the response ‘because I wanted to help people’. This may be true, although there are cases where knowledge serves dual purposes; people want the title of doctor and the associated money and it is for this reason that they help people. From my point of view, this is not very ethical of such a person considering a doctor that is more interested in the hidden benefits may not pay much attention to the patient. This can lead to a patient not getting the time and care they need as the doctor is more concerned about treating as many patients as possible to earn more. However this can be seen as beneficial as more people will be treated and considering the doctor is concerned about his/her title, he will try his level best not to ruin that by leaving a patient dissatisfied. Consider another scenario; suppose a thief was shot and needed medical care. The doctor is put in a position of saving a life or letting a criminal die. Depending on the doctors ethics a decision is made, however as a professional the doctor is in fact obliged to treat the patient and not allow his/her emotions to affect their job. Saving the life could be admirable or could be seen as ridiculous as the doctor saved a criminal. The doctor could lose his/her title if they don’t treat the patient therefore there is an element of self interest in this situation. Therefore the doctor’s knowledge puts them in a position to consider what they believe is morally correct and do so.

Looking at more everyday life situations that many people face which tie in to ethics as the area of knowledge, such as noticing someone copy you on a test. This person could have many personal problems and might need to copy you to pass, however this could get you in trouble too if anyone were to see. The person who’s being copied from has to make a decision as to expose someone that needed the help or to risk one’s own grade form being lost. Depending on ones own ethics this situation can be looked at in two perspectives. The first being, it’s ethically incorrect to turn someone that needed help in or it’s ethically incorrect to allow someone to cheat while everyone else should take the test properly.

Suppose there is a situation where having some knowledge doesn’t carry an ethical responsibility. For example, I notice my neighbour is giving birth and is being looked after. This doesn’t burden me with an ethical responsibility as the neighbour is doing fine regardless of whether I knew she was pregnant or not. However, there are exceptions to such arguments such as, in the case where the mother lives in unhygienic conditions and this will not be a suitable environment for the child. I will have to make a decision to either report the mother, possibly saving the child’s life but at the same time deprive the mother of her child which could be seen as morally incorrect, in my opinion. Therefore in this situation I would have the two knowledge issues pulling me in opposite decisions ethically on what to do.

In most cases, such as the few examples considered above, knowledge comes with an ethical responsibility, especially when it’s concerned with the higher levels of education. In everyday situations, there are some in which one will not have an ethical responsibility and the knowledge they obtain could be useless to them or it could be the complete opposite. In such situations it depends on how the knowledge is used and who it is used by and what they wish to achieve with it. Knowing that my neighbour is pregnant could mean something to my other neighbour as they could be related and they believe they have the ethical responsibility to congratulate and meet the newborn as this is ethical to the, whereas to me it had no significance in my life, unless there was the exception such as, she was an unfit mother or lived in an unsafe environment as stated above. In that case and in my opinion it would be my responsibility to report that, where I’ll have to consider taking a child away from its mother and whether that is fair on the mother or to not do anything which once again is, according to me, morally incorrect. Therefore it’s safe to conclude that the statement above does not have a conclusive end and knowledge mostly comes with an ethical responsibility depending on who obtains the knowledge and what is done with it.

1. http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/quotes/articles/80872/title/albert-einstein-quotes-on-war-peace [↑](#footnote-ref-1)